

Avian Influenza and Pandemic Planning

Update 1
9 September 2005

This issue outlines the wide range of work being undertaken as New Zealand enhances its preparedness for an influenza pandemic. Later issues will provide updates on the work.

International situation

- There have now been 112 confirmed cases of H5N1 in humans, with 57 deaths, since 26 December 2003. The cumulative number of confirmed human cases reported to WHO since December 2003 can be found at: www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/country/cases_table_2005_08_05/en/index.html
- Infection in birds has spread west through Asia. WHO agrees that control in wild birds is not feasible, and is recommending heightened surveillance in poultry, quick introduction of containment measures and increased vigilance for human cases. A global update can be found at www.oie.int/downld/AVIAN_INFLUENZA/A_AI-Asia.htm

New Zealand situation

- All government agencies are involved in planning for their agency and their sectors. This work is being led by the Ministry of Health with support from the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.
- The Ministry of Health is revising Appendix III (Pandemic Action Plan) of the National Health Emergency Plan: Infectious Diseases. As well as being the primary resource for the interagency work this will be available online at www.moh.govt.nz/pandemicinfluenza as soon as it is signed off – expected imminently.

Advisory groups

- The Ministry has set up a Pandemic Influenza Technical Advisory Group (PITAG) under the chairmanship of the Ministry's Dr Andrea Forde. This group met for the third time on Tuesday 6 September.
- A Pandemic Influenza Reference Committee (PIRC) under the chairmanship of John Ayling is being established. This group includes a wide range of members from across the health sector.
- There is also an intersectoral group addressing non-health issues that are directly affected by a pandemic, such as school closures, border control and the maintenance of critical infrastructure, including law and order.
- The Ministry of Health is also working closely with a number of other health sector organisations to finalise policies, plans and resources. This includes work on border issues, ensuring that infrastructure providers continue to provide services, and advice on air conditioning as well as work referred to above.

Current Ministry of Health work includes

- purchase and distribution of medicines and medical resources, such as:
 - antiviral distribution and how the national stockpile will be prioritised
 - vaccine purchase and distribution. We have put in place the ability to access vaccines so we can vaccinate all New Zealanders against pandemic influenza
 - personal protective equipment and critical clinical supplies
 - tender, distribution and storage process for other necessary medical equipment such as needles
 - community-based assessment centres

- sector linkages and co-ordination, which includes work with and about:
 - primary and community health care
 - DHB pandemic planners
 - DHB liaison
 - Pandemic Influenza Reference Group
 - international health agencies
 - health workforce issues
 - rest homes and aged care
 - disability support services
 - mental health facilities
- legislative issues including:
 - reviewing relevant legislation and powers to act
 - powers of Government to act in an election period
- technical advice including:
 - surveillance
 - modelling
 - supporting the work of PITAG
- ethical considerations including:
 - developing an ethical audit framework for the antiviral allocation process
 - developing prioritisation processes where none exist
- communication and public education including:
 - an overarching communications plan
 - developing resources for public education and advice
 - developing resources for health sector education and advice
 - an accessible website. www.moh.govt.nz/pandemicinfluenza
 - presentations to a wide range of agencies
- post-pandemic issues including:
 - psychosocial recovery
 - recovery of health services.